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Elen Putnam.
"Vital records of the
town of Brewster, Mass."

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Brewster



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PRESENTED BY



VITAL RECORDS OF THE TOWN OF BREWSTER, MASS., to the end of the year 1849, literally transcribed under the direction of George Ernest Bowman, Editor of the Mayflower Descendant. Published by the Mass. Society of Mayflower Descendants at the charge of the Cape Cod Town Record Fund. Boston, 1904. 8vo, cloth, pages 281.

This volume of records is the first fruit of the Cape Cod Town Record Fund which originated with members of the Mayflower Society, and by means of which we shall eventually have at hand for convenient reference the records of the principal towns in southeastern Massachusetts. Not only are we thus enabled to have access in print to a literal copy, not a chopped and disfigured alphabet of names and dates such as are being published by other societies (who should know better), but the records are preserved for all time-insured against loss or defacement by fire, water or any of the dangers which are ever present, and of which all who have occasion to refer to old records are well aware.

The history of this volume is of unusual interest. From the outset the Society has printed town records as in the original, and in the Mayflower Descendant are to be found in print many of our early records of births, marriages and deaths; but it is also safe to assert, though the writer has no information regarding this point, that it was expected that the State of Massachusetts would extend the operation of the Vital Statistics Law so as to allow the Mayflower Society the privileges accorded other societies printing town records, and thus not only obtain for public libraries throughout the state the advantages of possession of copies of this valuable record, but permit the Mayflower Society to recoup itself, in part, from the fund annually appropriated by the State for the encouragement of the preservation in print of our town records. This, however, was not to be. The Commission, having power to accept this work as one of the series of Vital Statistics, refused, on the ground, it is believed, that

not being printed in the fashion preferred by the Commission it could not be accepted. The law calls for a literal copy of the records to be deposited with the Secretary of State; does not prescribe how the printed copy shall be arranged. But it is manifestly the intent of the law to obtain the preservation of the records, and will anyone assert that there is any better manner of attaining that end than by printing a literal copy! We regret sincerely the failure of the Society to obtain recognition so well deserved, thus robbing the genealogical public to the extent of hampering the work of the Society in printing these invaluable records, which otherwise would proceed much faster.

Now as to the book itself. First, it is well printed on good paper, in proper sized type, and is a credit to all concerned.

Brewster was incorporated in 1803 and was named in honor of Elder William Brewster. Originally a part of Harwich, it is of course necessary to refer to other records than those here printed for the vital statistics of the people of Brewster before the incorporation, yet there are very many entries of births prior to the date of incorporation. In every case reference is given to the page of the original record, thus facilitating research if any doubt arises as to the correctness of the transcript. And in this connection it is well to bear in mind that in the town records accepted by the Commission, those publications subsidized by the State, this very important feature is entirely lacking. If one hesitates to accept the dictum of the editor of the alphabetically arranged Vital Statistics there is no help for it save to examine either the original or the MSS. copy in the office of the Secretary of State, and as the majority of ancient records do not appear in exact chronological order, there is almost sure to be an exasperating search to find the entry wanted.

Mr. Bowman has edited the Brewster record with good judgment, printing every entry except certain duplications, but when these entries are not in the literal sense duplicates of former entries he has not omitted them. Thus one may refer to this volume with as absolute surety of finding every item of the record as if the record itself were examined.

The names of ninety four advance subscribers to the Brewster Records are printed, among which appear but two Massachusetts libraries, a striking commentary on how the action of the Commission will surely be viewed by Public Libraries, who expected the usual distribution by the state, which has taken 500 copies of the other Vital Statistics at a price profitable to the publishers. A hasty estimate of what would have been due to the Mayflower Society under a proper

Gift

Author

(Person)

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interpretation of the law for 500 copies of this volume, the number the Commission is authorized to purchase, shows that the Mayflower Society might, under fair treatment, have recouped its fund to the extent of at least \$750, perhaps fully \$1000; which would have paid the cost of bringing out another volume of records..

There is an excellent index to the Brewster Records, and it would not surprise the writer if this volume brought about a needed reform in the rulings of the Commission, and resulted in the publication of Vital Statistics in the only form which should be countenanced officially.

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